



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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February 18, 2022

Nyasha Smith, Secretary
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Smith,

Today, I, along with Councilmembers Nadeau, Allen, Lewis George, and Henderson, am introducing the “Safer Intersections Amendment Act of 2022.” Please find enclosed a signed copy of the legislation.

In 2021, 40 people, 20 of whom were on foot or bike, were killed in traffic crashes on the streets of the District, the most since the 2015 launch of the Vision Zero initiative, which seeks to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2024. Meanwhile, the District’s transportation sector accounts for roughly 20% of our greenhouse gas emissions, and we’ve set a goal of reducing the share of commute trips made by single-occupancy vehicles to 25% by 2032. Having set these goals, we must act to meet them by encouraging sustainable and safer modes of transportation while protecting vulnerable road users. And, our traffic laws must reflect these goals.

This legislation consists of two key policy changes. The first would change when and how drivers may turn right on red at an intersection, largely prohibiting the practice. Right turns on red were only legalized in 1979 in the District and done so in the name of fuel efficiency (in response to the world-wide oil crisis happening at that time). However, little to no safety analysis was conducted prior to enacting that new policy. Today, we are no longer in an oil crisis, and cars are far more fuel efficient; in the case of hybrids and electric cars, the vehicles use little to no fuel when waiting for a traffic signal to turn green. On the other hand, allowing right turns on red is a safety hazard, increasing the likelihood of crashes, and putting road users at heightened risk of injury or death. Even where this practice is not putting lives at risk, it causes constant inconveniences for those walking or rolling through the District by placing cars in their way. The most successful countries when it comes to traffic safety and encouraging active transportation, such as the Netherlands and Denmark, all prohibit right turns on red; and, in North America, both New York City and Montreal have passed ordinances to largely prohibit this practice. This bill would put D.C. in this class of leaders in street safety.

Acknowledging that permitting right turns on red at certain intersections may be safer than prohibiting the practice, the bill would provide the District Department of Transportation with authority to allow right turn on red at an intersection where the agency demonstrates doing so would improve safety at that location.

The second policy change proposed in this bill is to legalize and prescribe elements of a practice commonly called the “Idaho Stop” for riders of bikes, e-bikes, scooters and other personal mobility devices. The Idaho Stop allows riders to treat red lights as stop signs and treat stop signs as yield signs. This change would recognize that our existing traffic laws were designed for cars, not bikes; thus, many of our current laws include behavior requirements ill-fit for ensuring the safety of roadway users other than drivers and modifying those laws will help improve safety for all roadway users. Allowing cyclists and other riders to maintain momentum and move more quickly through an intersection, while getting out ahead of traffic, reduces their exposure to traffic, making their ride more predictable and safer. This isn’t just conjecture: in jurisdictions where similar policies have been implemented, bicycle safety has improved. In Delaware, bike-related crashes at stop signs (which are now treated as yield signs) dropped by 23% in the first year after adopting the new policy. In Idaho, where the Idaho Stop has been the law since 1982, bike safety metrics have improved, as well. Additionally, treating stop signs as yield allows for riders to keep their momentum, leading to the conservation of energy, making riding more convenient and faster – necessary measures to encourage more ridership in line with existing District goals. By adopting this legislation, the District would join eleven other states that have already adopted versions of the Idaho Stop.

Should you have any questions about this legislation, please contact my Legislative Director, Michael Porcello, at mporcello@dccouncil.us or (202) 724-8062.

Thank you.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary M. Cheh', with a stylized, flowing script.

Mary M. Cheh

1 Brianne K. Nadeau
2 Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau

Mary M. Cheh
Councilmember Mary M. Cheh

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5 Janeese Lewis George
6 Councilmember Janeese Lewis George

Charles Allen
Councilmember Charles Allen

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10 Christina Henderson
11 Councilmember Christina Henderson

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15 A BILL
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20 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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25 To amend the District Traffic Act, 1925 to allow bicyclists to proceed through stop signs and red
26 lights safely, and to prohibit motor vehicle operators from making a right turn when facing
27 a red traffic control signal, except where doing so would improve safety at a given
28 intersection.
29

30 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this
31 act may be cited as the “Safer Intersections Amendment Act of 2022”.

32 Sec. 2. The District of Columbia Traffic Act, 1925, approved March 3, 1925 (43 Stat.
33 1119; D.C. Official Code § 50-2201 *et seq.*) is amended as follows:

(a) Section 2 (D.C. Official Code § 50-2201.02) is amended by adding a new paragraph 13(A) to read as follows:

“(13A) “Rider” mean a person riding a bicycle, e-bicycle, electric mobility device, or other personal mobility device. Rider does not mean a person operating a moped or motorcycle.”

(b) Section 9d (D.C. Official Code § 50–2201.04d) is amended to read as follows:

“§ 50–2201.04d. Riders’ Safe Crossing at Intersections.

“(a) A rider approaching a stop sign or flashing red traffic control signal may cautiously proceed into and through the intersection or make a turn without stopping, provided that the rider:

“(1) Slows down,

“(2) Yields the right-of-way to pedestrians and to other traffic lawfully using the intersection, and

“(3) Determines there is no immediate hazard.

“(b) A rider approaching a steady red traffic control signal may cautiously proceed into and through the intersection or make a left turn, provided that the rider:

“(1) Makes a complete stop;

“(2) Yields the right-of-way to pedestrians and to other traffic lawfully using the intersection; and

“(3) Determines there is no immediate hazard.

“(c) A rider approaching a steady red traffic control signal may make a right turn without stopping, provided that the rider:

56 “(1) Yields the right-of-way to pedestrians and to other traffic lawfully using the
57 intersection; and

58 “(2) Determines there is no immediate hazard.

59 “(d) A rider may cross at an intersection while following the pedestrian traffic control
60 signal for the bicyclist’s direction of travel while facing a steady red traffic signal, as in the case
61 of a leading pedestrian interval.”

62 (c) Section 9e (D.C. Official Code § 50-2201.04e) is amended to read as follows:

63 “(a) Beginning 180 days after the effective date of this Act, except as provided in
64 subsection (c) of this section, a motor vehicle operator shall not make a right turn when facing a
65 red traffic control signal.

66 “(b) Within 180 days after the effective date of this Act, DDOT shall erect signage
67 indicating “No Right Turn on Red in the District of Columbia” at an intersection that:

68 “(1) Is within 400 feet of a playground;

69 “(2) Is within 400 feet of a school or childcare facility;

70 “(3) Has a bike lane running through it;

71 “(4) Is within 400 feet of a recreation center;

72 “(5) Is within 400 feet of a library; or

73 “(6) Is within 400 feet of a Metrorail station entrance.

74 “(c)(1) DDOT may permit motor vehicle operators to make a right turn when facing a red
75 traffic control signal at an intersection only if the agency:

76 “(A) Determines that allowing a motor vehicle operator to make a right
77 turn when facing a red traffic at an intersection control signal would improve safety at that
78 intersection; and

79 “(B) Publishes the agency’s rationale for why permitting motor vehicle
80 operators to make a right turn when facing a red traffic control signal would improve safety at
81 that intersection on the agency website.

82 “(2) Motor vehicle level of service shall not be a basis for the determination made
83 under paragraph (1)(A) of this subsection that permitting motor vehicle operators to make a right
84 turn when facing a red traffic control signal would improve safety at that intersection.

85 “(e) Within 90 days after the effective date of this Act, DDOT shall undertake a public
86 education campaign on changes to when and how motor vehicle operators may make a right turn
87 when facing a red traffic control signal.”

88 Sec. 3. Fiscal impact statement.

89 The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal
90 impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975,
91 approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

92 Sec. 4. Effective date.

93 This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the
94 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of congressional review as
95 provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December
96 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code § 1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of
97 Columbia Register.